

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**AN OPERATIONAL ARMY RESERVE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH**

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ABSTRACT

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The Army Reserve has been in a constant state of mobilization since 1995 with the advent of the Bosnia crisis and the pace of mobilization increased exponentially after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. What has been called the “Abrams Doctrine” and the Total Force initiatives over the last three decades have institutionalized the concept of an “operational” Army Reserve, but the ramifications of this concept are only now being realized during an extended period of mobilization and support to “The Long War.” Little effort has been put into examining how the Army Reserve has “transmitted” this significant transformation throughout the force; and its impact on personnel, structure and overall organizational health. The intent of this paper is to analyze the transformation of the Army Reserve from a strategic to an operational force and how this change is being embedded/reinforced in the institution; examine current issues and trends in recruiting, retention, and morale; to provide the Army Reserve leadership an understanding of the long term implications and impact of one of the most significant transformations in Army Reserve history.

AN OPERATIONAL ARMY RESERVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH

Today's Army Reserve is portrayed by its leadership as an operational force that mobilizes and deploys on very short notice, complementing the joint force in combat operations around the world. Gone are the days when the Army Reserve was considered a strategic force that stayed "in reserve" until it was needed to supplement other forces, and had long lead time and train-up time to prepare for deployment. The old order began to change in the mid-1990s as Army Reserve Soldiers were deployed more frequently for operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. And after September 11, 2001, the pace and level of mobilizations increased exponentially for an extended period, a level not seen since the Korean War. More than 160,000 Army Reserve Soldiers in a force of nearly 200,000 have mobilized to support active Army operations. The reality for Army Reserve Soldiers today is that they are part of an operational force.¹

This transformation from a strategic force in reserve to an operational element prepared to mobilize and deploy on a congruent time-scale with active Army and joint counterparts is arguably the most significant transformation the Army Reserve has undergone in its 99 year history and has significant organizational implications. The purpose of this paper is to provide history and background on this transformation, identify current issues and trends brought about by this transformation; provide analysis and implications of Army Reserve Soldiers' and Employers' perceptions of this change; and make recommendations for Army Reserve leadership to consider for long term organizational health i.e. the ability to recruit and retain quality Army Reserve Soldiers.

Historical Context and Cultural Change

The transition from a strategic to an operational reserve has its roots in the Total Force policy first articulated by Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird in the early 1970s. President Nixon made an election-year promise in 1968 to do away with the draft. When he took office he tasked Laird to come up with a way to end conscription. Laird knew that an all-volunteer force would require substantial Reserve Component involvement. In August 1970, Laird directed that all the services achieve economies by increasing reliance on the combat and combat support units of the Guard and Reserve.²

Following Laird's directive, in October 1972 the newly appointed Army Chief of Staff, General Creighton Abrams, began an effort to increase reliance on the Reserve Components while increasing the size of the force to meet the Soviet threat. Abrams expanded the Army from 13 to 16 divisions by reducing structure to two active brigades per division, and

incorporating one Reserve Component brigade and support forces to “round out” the 16 division structure.³ With the advent of these “round out” brigades, Active and Reserve Component force structure became intertwined and would necessitate reserve mobilization for future conflicts.

This effort by General Abrams, along with other efforts he made to bring more focus, emphasis and reliance on the Reserve Components, became encapsulated in what has been called the “Abrams Doctrine.” Proponents of the Abrams Doctrine say that reliance on the Reserve Component provides a strong bond between military and civil society. “Any large scale mobilization of Reserves would affect communities throughout the country and engage the American people.”⁴ This engaging of the American people was something that many felt was missing from the Vietnam War.

Laird and Abrams set the Army on a path of increasing reliance on its Reserve Components that holds true to this day. As a result of their initiatives, the Army Reserve became a force primarily structured for combat support and combat service support operations, while the National Guard focused on combat arms.⁵ The Army Reserve today contains high percentages of key Army capabilities as outlined by the former Chief, Army Reserve Lt. Gen. Thomas J. Plewes in 1999:

Today, the Army cannot go to war without the Army Reserve. It provides 45 percent of the Army’s combat service support units and 26 percent of the Army’s combat support units. Further the Army Reserve provides: 100 percent of the Army’s training and exercise divisions, 100 percent of its railway units and enemy prisoner of war brigades, 97 percent of civil affairs units, 84 percent of psychological operations forces, 72 percent of the movement control structure, 63 percent of the Army’s chemical decontamination and detection capability, 59 percent of the medical capability, and 50 percent of the Army’s watercraft.⁶

Although the structure is changing, the FY 2007 Army Budget Analysis supports the numbers contained in this quote, emphasizing just how much the active Army relies on the Army Reserve for key combat support and combat service support functions.

Out of necessity in pursuing the Global War on Terrorism, Army Reserve units and Soldiers have clearly been mobilized at high levels for longer periods of time than at any time in recent history. As such, the recent Quadrennial Defense Review stated that the Reserve Component needed to be “operationalized” so that selected Reservists and units are more accessible and readily deployable.⁷ For the purposes of this paper, our definition of Operational Reserve (OR) is just a reflection of this increased operations tempo of the last decade including Bosnia and Kosovo, a departure from the strategic reserve of the past.

While the OR has been a reality for some time, it has been a fairly recent occurrence to attempt to embed and reinforce this change in a culture whose leadership grew up in an era of

long lead times for training and preparation prior to deployment for a major war. So how has the Army Reserve proceeded to embed, transmit and reinforce this landmark change throughout its organizational culture? Using cultural change embedding mechanisms as outlined by organizational culture expert Edgar H. Schein, it has been a matter of what the Army Reserve leadership has been focusing on, official statements and media stories about the transformation, and most importantly, organizational restructuring.⁸

The statements and account of the “Abrams Doctrine” listed above are already part of the transition story and have been used for years to promote a ready and relevant Army Reserve. But to members of the Army Reserve who grew up in the strategic reserve (requiring minimum participation of one weekend a month and two weeks each summer), the operational use of the force is something new and has taken some getting used to. For personnel who joined after 1995, it has been a way of life.

Army Reserve leaders only recently began incorporating the new “Operational Reserve” term into the Army Reserve lexicon. Lt. Gen. James R. Helmly, Chief, Army Reserve from May 2002 to May 2006, launched the “year of the Army Reserve leader: a campaign for cultural change,” in 2004 to emphasize the transition from a strategic reserve to an OR and the need for Army Reserve leaders to embrace this change.

We must address attacking the culture of the 'weekend warrior.' Our Soldiers must understand this new culture and say: 'I am a Soldier. I specialize in the performance of my civilian-based skills. I will prepare myself for an active duty operational assignment as if I knew the day and hour it will come.'⁹

From 2004 forward, the term and concept of an operational reserve appears as a regular issue in Reserve Component (RC) discussions as the leadership contended with the reality. In testimony before Congress in April 2005, Thomas F. Hall, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, confirmed that the RC is no longer a strategic reserve to be used only in a major war, but an operational reserve that supports day-to-day defense requirements.¹⁰ Upon taking over as the new Chief, Army Reserve in June 2006, Lt. Gen Jack Stultz updated his organization's vision to include the term: The Army Reserve is a community-based, federal operational force of skill-rich warrior-citizens providing complimentary capabilities for joint-expeditionary and domestic operations. In explaining his vision, Stultz says “The old Army Reserve was a strategic force and we advertised it as such, one weekend a month, two weeks in the summertime. That all changed after 9/11 – we’re now an operational force.”¹¹

The Army Reserve also made a conscious effort to change its recruiting advertising. Advertising for the Army Reserve as recently as three years ago emphasized an expectation of one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer for annual training as a way to entice new

members to a great part time job. Ads in the late 1990s emphasized “being your own sweet self 98% of the time.” Emphasis now has shifted away from bonuses and college money to service to country and values; and there is no discussion of time limits. A common theme heard today is “train near home, ready when needed.”¹²

How an organization talks about itself is important when implementing cultural change and the examples above show that the military leadership views the Army Reserve as an operational asset, and necessarily so given the current level of operations. But actions speak louder than words, and nowhere has the transition to an OR had more impact than in a massive restructuring effort taking place within the Army Reserve. Restructuring efforts being undertaken by the Army Reserve since 2005 include divesting force structure that either exceeds congressionally authorized end strength or is not relevant to current operations, reducing the number of personnel authorizations in non-deployable units, increasing the number of Soldiers in specialties needed to support current operations, and streamlining command and control of Army Reserve forces.¹³

As part of this restructuring, the Army Reserve is flattening its command and control structure to be more responsive. To that end, 11 Army Reserve Regional Readiness Commands across the United States are standing down and being replaced by four Regional Readiness Sustainment Commands. Also, the Army Reserve is incorporating functional commands into its structure that relate to a specific dimension of warfighting. “Through 2008, we will activate deployable functional command and control (C2) Army Reserve forces, including an aviation command, five expeditionary sustainment commands, one military police command, three combat support brigades (maneuver enhancement) and eight sustainment brigades.”¹⁴

The Army Reserve is also identifying capabilities needed to fill active Army operational requirements to ensure the force is structured in a way to effectively meet those needs. They will eliminate unneeded capabilities. “As a result, we are building upon core competencies in civil affairs, psychological operations, and medical programs while divesting ourselves of units that are less in demand, such as smoke generating companies.”¹⁵

Clearly, the transition from strategic to an OR has had impact on the culture and the structure of the Army Reserve and changed the service paradigm for its members. But what else has it impacted?

Current Issues and Trends

It is important to examine current issues and trends within the Army Reserve to understand the impact of the transition on the force. Soldiers (and potential Soldiers) in the Army Reserve have the option to “vote with their feet” and leave (or not join) the service if they feel things are not headed in the right direction, so a look at recruiting, retention and trends in morale are appropriate to understand the impact an operational reserve is having on the force.

Upon examining recruiting and retention numbers over the last few years for the Army Reserve, while it is apparent that there have been some challenges, the story has not been entirely negative. The Army Reserve has missed its aggregate recruiting mission for the last two years, achieving only 85% of its mission in FY 05 and 95% of its mission in FY 06. However, the Army Reserve recruits prior service military personnel from all the services and has exceeded this mission over the last two years, masking the fact that recruiting command has missed its non-prior service recruiting goals by 28% and 22% respectively the last two years for the Army Reserve. While these numbers are not disastrous, the Army Reserve continues to miss its mark, even at a time when cash bonuses are at all time highs for new recruits, and for active duty Soldiers who agree to join the Army Reserve when their active stint is up. Also, U.S. Army Recruiting Command increased the recruiting age from 29 to 41 as the upper limit to help improve the recruiting effort and began to accept recruits who scored lower on aptitude tests. Even in light of these efforts, Army Reserve end strength below congressionally mandated levels and recruiting is not able to improve the situation.¹⁶

On the retention side of the house, RC enlisted attrition remains strong and is well within acceptable limits. Information from a Defense Manpower Data Center report through June 2005 shows that increased mobilizations are not causing members to leave in large numbers.¹⁷ The Army Reserve achieved its overall retention mission for the last two fiscal years (FY 2005 and 2006) and appears to be on track for FY 2007. The Army Reserve has exceeded its careerist (those who serve beyond initial tour) for the last three fiscal years, but has struggled to make its first-term Soldier retention mission, achieving mission in only one out of the last three FYs. However, the Army Reserve has achieved monthly missions in the current FY and is on track to achieve all retention missions.¹⁸

It is important to consider the current morale of the force and satisfaction with the service in light of the increased use of Army Reserve forces in current operations. Anecdotal evidence of the purported impact an operational reserve is having on its Soldiers has appeared in the press. The Los Angeles Times published the contents of an internal memo from Lt. Gen. Helmly detailing his concerns about the Army Reserve becoming a broken force, listing his

concerns: the “burdens placed on military reservists since the Sept. 11 attacks, combined with ‘dysfunctional’ Pentagon policies, have damaged morale and retention and threaten to turn the Army Reserve into a broken force.”¹⁹ An article on Military.com headlined “Iraq Reservists Feel Second Class Treatment” discussed the results of a sociologist’s survey in Iraq showing lower morale among Reserve Component members as compared to their active counterparts. The survey listed the perception that the reserve Soldiers served longer in theater than their active counterparts and were less likely to know the end date for their deployment, as key issues.²⁰

The Defense Manpower Data Center has been tracking morale and satisfaction issues since May 2003 for the RC and has published their findings in the semi-annual Status of Forces Survey of the RC. Surveys administered from May 2003 through November 2004 showed steady declines in military members’ intentions to stay in the service, and reports of stress in their military lives have increased. However, results from the December 2005 Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Members indicate increases from the 2004 report in members’ intentions to stay in the military, support from supervisors at civilian jobs, satisfaction with the military way of life, personal and unit readiness, and perceptions of training effectiveness. Reports of stress in military and personal lives have also decreased from the 2004 report. Most indicators are below their initial May 2003 numbers and family support and spousal support of Army Reserve service remain at low levels. Regardless, in analyzing responses from personnel who have deployed for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, satisfaction with service and morale are higher in those cases. So, although morale is a concern and should be monitored, it appears that there is more of a concern for Soldiers who have not deployed than those who have completed their missions.

Mobilization issues and how the active Army accesses Army Reserve units and personnel have become a major area of focus with the advent of the OR and has led to a new concept to bring predictability to the process: the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) Model. ARFORGEN, which the Army defines as “the structured progression of increased unit readiness over time, resulting in recurring periods of availability of trained ready and cohesive units prepared for operational deployment,” is being implemented in both the Active and Reserve Component. ARFORGEN involves units progressing through a series of three successive force pools: the Reset, the Train, and the Ready force pools. ARFORGEN for the Army runs on a three year cycle, while for the Army Reserve (which adopted ARFORGEN as the Army Reserve Force Generation model) runs on a five year cycle. ARFORGEN became a necessity with the current high level of mobilizations and deployments and recognition that the Army was operating with outdated mobilization policies.

The mobilization policies established during the Cold War and those exercised during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) are outdated and were detrimental to most mobilizing units and Soldiers. In the build up to OIF, there were numerous incidents of Army Reserve Soldiers who were alerted for mobilization and didn't receive orders for weeks. On the other hand, there were a number of Soldiers who were alerted and had to mobilize and deploy in the space of 48 hours due to a new system for approving the mobilization of forces.²¹ Implemented by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the new process called Request For Forces (RFF), scrapped the Army's Time Phased Force Deployment List (TPFDL) which is a voluminous document that lists the forces that are to be sent into battle and the sequence of their deployment. The TPFDL insures that combat units arrive with enough combat support and combat service support units in theater to allow them to conduct operations. The bulk of the Army Reserve consists of these types of units. Rumsfeld rejected the list as "too big" and took it upon himself to review and approve units and troops moving into theater through the RFF process.²² This impacted the force flow into theater and negatively affected the standardized, predictable process that the TPFDL provided for the Army Reserve. "The process must be evaluated and revamped to ensure that it is able to accomplish the mission."²³

The world we live in today of continuous operations renders obsolete the old Army readiness paradigm of "all ready, all the time." Ongoing, full-spectrum expeditionary operations are the new reality. The ARFORGEN process gives commanders predictable deployment windows and allows them to manage the readiness and training of forces accordingly. These windows are based on rotation cycles of one operational deployment in three years for the Active Component, and one operational deployment in five years for the RC.²⁴ Lt. Gen. Jack Stultz, the current Chief, Army Reserve defines his organizational ARFORGEN model as:

A key to how the Army Reserve has been able to shift from a strategic reserve to an operational force is the U.S. Army Force Generation Model (ARFORGEN). ARFORGEN is a process that moves Soldiers and equipment through defined phases to reset train and attain full mission readiness as they approach deployment. Under the Army Reserve version of the model, a Soldier would expect to mobilize and deploy every five years, if needed.²⁵

The implementation of ARFORGEN is an important part of the Army's deliberate effort to complete the transformation of its RC from a strategic to an operational force. However, for ARFORGEN to work for the Army Reserve it is important that the Department of Defense (DOD) provide strategic mobilization guidance to the Army now on how the Army Reserve can be used to fight this long war.²⁶

Analysis of Current Soldier Perceptions

Considering this background and some of the current issues brought about by the OR concept, it is important to understand the view and perceptions current Army Reserve Soldiers have regarding their institution and its transformation. An online survey was produced and approved through the Office of the Chief, Army Reserve to support this project and gauge the current perceptions of Army Reserve Soldiers regarding the impact that the increased use of the Army Reserve has had on their careers and their satisfaction with service.²⁷

An analysis of the overall response to the survey shows a fairly representative cross-section of the Army Reserve responded to the survey. When asked their duty status, nearly 62 percent (6181) of the respondents were Troop Program Unit (TPU) members who make up the bulk of the Army Reserve force. Nearly 16 percent (1593) were Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) Soldiers, 4.7 percent (467) were Individual Mobilization Augmentees (IMA) and three percent (305) were Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) Soldiers. A category of “Other” was included with nearly 15 percent (1454) providing this response. The bulk of those responding as “other” were mobilized in support of current operations. Other responses under “Other” included military technicians, Soldiers in training or on medical hold, and Cadets attending Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs, to name a few. The table below graphically shows the breakdown of the duty statuses of the respondents.

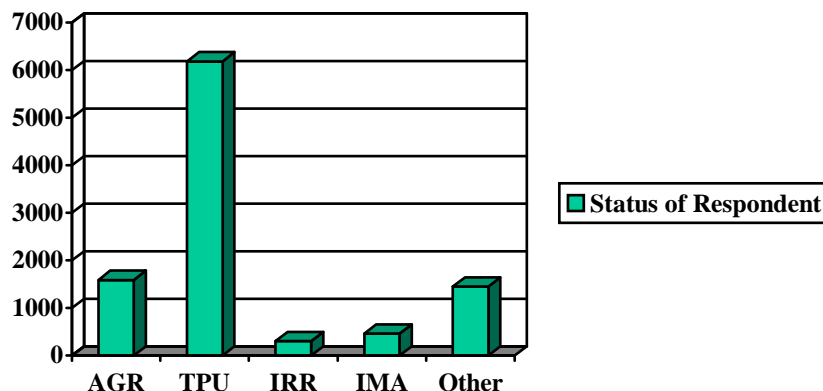


Table 1.

The respondents were predominantly older and advanced in rank, with 49 percent of the total responding that they were E-5 and above and 27 percent responding that they were O-4 and above on the officer side. Warrant officers were not included in this survey. Nearly 80 percent of the respondents were 31-years-old and older. Table two below provides detailed demographics.

| Demographics of Respondents | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----|-------|----|------------------|----|--|----|
| Rank | % | Age | % | Years of Service | % | Times in career involuntarily mobilized 6 months or more | % |
| E1-E4 | 12 | 17-21 | 4 | 5 or less | 13 | 0 times | 31 |
| E5 and Up | 49 | 22-30 | 16 | 6-10 | 15 | 1 time | 45 |
| O1-O3 | 12 | 31-40 | 29 | 11-15 | 13 | 2 times | 18 |
| O4 and up | 27 | >40 | 51 | >15 | 59 | 3 or more times | 6 |

Table 2.

Considering the questions that were asked regarding the impact of the OR on an Army Reserve Soldier's career, it makes sense that Soldiers more advanced in age and rank would respond and provide feedback grounded in their years of experience. Overall, only 13.2 percent of the respondents had 5 years or less of service, nearly 80 percent were male, and a full 30 percent had never been mobilized and deployed for more than 6 months during their career. On the other hand, nearly 24 percent had been mobilized two or more times involuntarily.

As far as the overall employment picture for the respondents, 43 percent work in the public sector (federal, state and local government), 37 percent work on the private sector for a private firm, and six percent were self-employed or owned their own business. Fifteen percent chose "other" as a response to the question on sector of employment, the bulk of them responding with Reserve on Active duty or Active Guard and Reserve. Other responses included those from students, the unemployed, healthcare industry workers and the clergy to name a few. The table below provides a detailed breakdown of work sector overall and by Army Reserve duty status.

| In what sector of the work force do you work? | Overall | TPU | IRR | AGR | IMA | Other |
|--|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Public sector (federal, state, local government/service) | 43% | 43% | 31% | 49% | 48% | 37% |
| Private sector (private company) | 37% | 43% | 47% | 12% | 35% | 39% |
| Self employed / Own business | 6% | 6% | 8% | 1% | 9% | 9% |
| Other | 14% | 8% | 14% | 38% | 8% | 15% |

Table 3.

Overall, responses from Army Reserve Soldiers to questions regarding the transition to an OR showed a mostly positive or neutral view. Nearly 28 percent said that the increased operations tempo (more mobilizations, increased training commitment) has had a positive impact on their morale and satisfaction with service with 42 percent responding that it has had no or neutral impact. Having said that, 30 percent overall responded that the increased

operations tempo was having a negative impact on their satisfaction with service in the Army Reserve. The following table gives a detailed breakdown of responses.

| How has the increased Operations Tempo (more mobilizations, increased training commitment) associated with the transition to on operational reserve impacted your morale and satisfaction with your Army Reserve service? | Overall | TPU | IRR | AGR | IMA | Other |
|--|----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Positive impact on morale and satisfaction with service | 28% | 27% | 26% | 25% | 25% | 36% |
| Negative impact on morale and satisfaction with service | 30% | 32% | 39% | 22% | 25% | 27% |
| Neutral/no impact on morale & satisfaction with service | 42% | 41% | 34% | 53% | 50% | 37% |

Table 4.

In response to questions regarding the ARFORGEN Model and frequency of mobilizations, overall responses showed a good deal of support (41percent) for the current concept of the possibility of one mobilization in five years. However, given other options, nearly 13 percent chose the option of one deployment every 10 years, and nearly 30 percent chose the option of a six to eight month deployment every three years. Respondents had the option of choosing “other” in response to the question on ARFORGEN and providing their recommendation for the optimal frequency for Army Reserve individual and unit mobilizations. Responses ran the gamut from “never mobilize me unless I volunteer,” to “mobilize only in times of national emergency and declared war,” to “mobilize us for the duration of the conflict and let’s get it over with.” Looking at the responses it was clear that there is no “cookie-cutter” approach that works for mobilizations, especially for individuals. The concept of managing mobilizations based on each individual Soldier’s situation and “volunteerism” were recurrent themes in many responses. Some sample responses include “take volunteers first” and “use volunteers and make it easier for them to get orders.” A detailed breakdown of responses to ARFORGEN-related questions is provided in the following two tables.

| The Army Reserve Force Generation model proposes a training / employment cycle that would have units available for mobilization and deployment once every five years. Being available for mobilization and deployment one year in every five years is: | Overall | TPU | IRR | AGR | IMA | Other |
|---|----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Too much of a commitment for me and my family. I would leave the service. | 16% | 18% | 25% | 9% | 21% | 15% |
| Is the right level of commitment. | 56% | 56% | 48% | 63% | 54% | 50% |
| I could be available on a more regular basis than one year every five years. | 28% | 26% | 27% | 28% | 25% | 35% |

Table 5.

| What do you feel would be the optimal ratio (time mobilized vs. time in normal duty status) for Army Reserve unit/individual mobilizations? | Overall | TPU | IRR | AGR | IMA | Other |
|---|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| One year mobilized in five years | 41% | 39% | 39% | 47% | 35% | 40% |
| One year mobilized in ten years | 13% | 14% | 16% | 8% | 17% | 11% |
| Six-eight months mobilized in three years | 29% | 30% | 28% | 31% | 27% | 27% |
| Other | 17% | 17% | 15% | 14% | 21% | 22% |

Table 6.

Many responses recommended looking at the mobilization models for other services, which often include shorter and more frequent mobilizations. One representative respondent said:

More frequent rotations for a shorter period of time. It might be beneficial to explore the model of deployment the other services are using. Soldiers don't stay away for as long, but because of the more frequent and shorter deployments, the train up period prior to the mobilization may be shorter and our Army would stay consistently strong.

Several responses reflected the sentiment that Soldiers would prefer to be mobilized for longer periods or until the mission is complete. One respondent said:

In all honesty, I would rather be activated for the duration of the conflict and have the country declare war. To me, deploying active units every other year or reserve units once every three to five years is making the worst of both worlds. There isn't enough time to get settled back into civilian life, and it takes too long for guys to figure out how to actually do their jobs in wartime. I'd rather stay here for three years and know that I'm done, rather than bouncing back and forth between here and home.

Based on responses to the survey regarding an optimal mobilization ratio it is evident that there is no standard that will fit all Army Reserve Soldiers at any given point in their careers. Younger Soldiers may be available on a more regular basis, whereas Soldiers with ten or more years of service have established civilian careers and families and may have special considerations. If the Army Reserve can establish an agile personnel management system that brings focus to the individual circumstances of each member of the force, it can effectively manage mobilizations and assignments of Soldiers who are readily and frequently available, and those who need more time. This view lends itself to the concept of an Army Reserve force that has both strategic and operational elements. One Soldier commented as follows:

A "cookie cutter" approach does not work across the human life-cycle model. A Soldier that plans on making the USAR a twenty-year commitment may be willing to deploy 1:5 for the first ten years. However, employment and family priorities can quickly lower the USAR to the bottom of the ladder. A Soldier with ten years

of service may be willing to deploy one more time but may have already walked with their feet after the first or second deployment.

When asked about the impact of reserve mobilizations on their civilian careers, overall, 67 percent of the respondents said they have never lost a job or never had their job negatively impacted by mobilizing and deploying with the Army Reserve. Twenty-two percent responded that they kept their job, but the conditions of their employment had been adversely impacted i.e. they were moved to a less desirable position or the work atmosphere was more hostile or less supportive. Nearly 10 percent of those surveyed said they had lost their job or went out of business due to a mobilization. A detailed breakdown of responses to questions related to employment issues for Army Reserve Soldiers is provided in the following table.

| Has your civilian job ever been impacted adversely by mobilizing and deploying with the Army Reserve? | Overall | TPU | IRR | AGR | IMA | Other |
|---|----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Yes. I lost my job or I went out of business. | 10% | 10% | 15% | 5% | 11% | 12% |
| Yes. I kept my job but the conditions of my employment changed (i.e. moved to a less desirable position, or work atmosphere more hostile and less supportive) | 22% | 25% | 22% | 10% | 27% | 24% |
| No. I never lost my job due to a mobilization/deployment. | 68% | 65% | 63% | 85% | 62% | 64% |
| How supportive of your military career and your mobilizations has your organization been over the years? | Overall | TPU | IRR | AGR | IMA | Other |
| Very supportive | 52% | 50% | 44% | 65% | 44% | 51% |
| Somewhat supportive | 38% | 40% | 40% | 27% | 45% | 39% |
| Not supportive / Opposed | 10% | 10% | 16% | 8% | 11% | 10% |

Table 7.

While it's important to understand the perceptions of the Army Reserve force as a whole, it is also important to breakdown the responses by duty status to understand the impact on the various parts of the force, from the traditional drilling reserve Soldier (Troop Program Unit) to Individual Mobilization Augmentees (IMA) and Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) Soldiers, to the full time Active Guard and Reserve Soldiers. The following paragraphs discuss responses by duty status that reflect a significant difference from the overall responses (noted in red above).

Thirty-seven percent of the IRR respondents said that increased operations tempo has had a negative impact on their morale and satisfaction with service, and 25 percent said that the ARFORGEN model of one mobilization every five years was too much of a commitment for them. Further, a full 37 percent of the IRR respondents had negative impacts on employment situations due to a mobilization with the Army Reserve. These responses show that frequent

mobilizations negatively affect Soldiers in the IRR more than Soldiers in other duty statuses. This could be reflective of the lack of active management of these Soldiers and unclear communication regarding expectations for Soldiers make up this part of the force. Army Reserve Soldiers in TPU and IMA status listed similar negative impacts on employment situations.

For the Soldiers who responded “other” as their duty status (primarily mobilized Soldiers) 35 percent of them said they could be available on a more regular basis than once every five years. Also, 36 percent said that the increased operations tempo of the operational reserve has had a positive impact on their morale and satisfaction with service, significantly higher than the overall group. This supports other survey data that shows higher morale for mobilized Soldiers and may reflect that a good portion of those currently deployed are volunteers or are the part of the force that is more readily available.

Analysis of Current Employer Perceptions

The transition to an OR with longer and more frequent deployments brings to question the ability of employers to maintain their businesses and profitability when their Army Reserve employees are called to active duty. There has been increased reporting in the press regarding the “job woes” of reservists returning from deployments. “The number of reservists and National Guard members who say they have been reassigned, lost benefits or been fired from civilian jobs after returning from duty has increased by more than 70% over the past six years.”²⁸ Does this reflect employers’ response to the increased use of the RC?

Out of 7.4 million total employers based on current U.S. census data, about 115,000 businesses currently employ members of the RC, according to a DOD survey. Large businesses employ most reservists (25 percent), followed by the U.S. government (20 percent). Small businesses with less than 100 employees employ 18 percent, and nine percent of reservists are self-employed. Many of these employers are unaware of the transformation to an OR, even companies among the Fortune 500.²⁹ “For example, though the airline industry depends heavily on reservists, many airline executives were surprised to hear mention of the OR concept during an Employer Support to the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) symposium last year at the Reserve Officers Association (ROA) headquarters.”³⁰

Recent research conducted by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) shows support for these comments. “CBO’s analysis revealed that most employers are unaffected by the activation of reservists. Only about 6 percent of business establishments employ reservists, and

fewer than half a percent of self-employed people are in the reserves.”³¹ So, while it appears that the numbers do not bear out any major impacts on U.S businesses, there are some areas of concern for employers.

Based on recent survey data, the impact of multiple reserve mobilizations, while having minimal overall impact, has affected some areas of the work force more than others. “The deployment of thousands of police officers to Iraq, Afghanistan and other military reserve posts is costing local law enforcement agencies up to \$1.2 billion per year, according to a new analysis of Justice Department data.”³² The impact has been particularly acute on small law enforcement agencies. “The fire department for Washington Township, in northern Indianapolis, employs 156 career firefighters and responds to about 12,000 calls a year. Currently, nine of its personnel are Citizen Warriors; three have been activated—one twice—and one is finishing up a year’s deployment in Iraq.”³³ While the overall impact to employers may be minimal, many public service jobs rely on Army Reserve Soldiers and are impacted more than private sector jobs.

Implications of Responses for Army Reserve

The responses from Army Reserve Soldiers show that there is no immediate threat to the long term viability of the Army Reserve, and that, with consideration of some refinements suggested by the survey conducted for this paper, the institution can continue to successfully operate as an OR. The following table shows responses to a related question.

| Is the use of the Army Reserve as an operational force a positive move for the Army Reserve as a whole or do you feel it is negative and may hurt long term organizational health? | Overall | TPU | IRR | AGR | IMA | Other |
|---|----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Positive | 48% | 47% | 40% | 51% | 49% | 52% |
| Negative | 31% | 32% | 36% | 27% | 37% | 26% |
| Neutral | 21% | 21% | 23% | 22% | 14% | 22% |

Table 8.

It is clear that the bulk of the force is satisfied or at least accepting of the direction the Army Reserve is has taken in transitioning to an operational force and that for the most part, there is a good deal of support for the ARFORGEN model and the concept of being available for mobilization once every five years. However, nearly a third (or more depending on status) of the force sees the transition to an OR as a negative event. Given that recruiting and retention numbers remain fairly strong, perhaps this reflects a recognition of the varied needs of a diverse force that can be addressed by implementing some of the recommendations that follow this section.

On the employer front, it seems that the increased use of the Army Reserve has not had a detrimental impact on the overall employment picture for Army Reserve Soldiers and has not negatively impacted American businesses to any great extent. Recent employer surveys showed little impact on major businesses and little awareness of the OR concept. The survey conducted for this paper showed that Soldiers are mostly satisfied with the support they get from their employers, and have not had a wholesale loss of jobs due to increased use of the Army Reserve. However, the impact on certain sectors as suggested by some current articles and self-employed Army Reserve Soldiers (six percent according to survey) is an important consideration.

Recommendations

There are those in the media and even in the Army Reserve who fear that the increased use of the Army Reserve may be a threat to the long term health of the organization. More than five years into the Global War on Terrorism, data shows that the organization remains a viable force with no significant negative trends in recruiting, retention or morale. However, based on supporting data outlined above, this paper will recommend policy initiatives that will benefit the Army Reserve during its ongoing transformation to an OR.

First and foremost, the Army Reserve should consider flexible personnel and force management options to support future mobilizations. While the survey showed a good deal of support for the ARFORGEN model, there was strong support for shorter and more frequent rotations. Also, numerous respondents mentioned mobilizing “for the duration” to show national resolve and allow them to focus on ending the conflict instead of having to go back every few years. If the Army Reserve could become more agile in how it manages its people, it could make serving more appealing to a broader range of potential recruits, and provide flexibility to those currently serving. Having a standard and predictable mobilization time frame of one mobilization every five years that ARFORGEN offers is a good base. But having pools of personnel and units that can train and serve on a more regular basis can benefit both the Army Reserve and those who are looking for more frequent tours. On the other end of the scale, for those who are essential employees in their civilian jobs or run their own businesses and cannot mobilize on a one in five basis but perhaps could mobilize one in ten, they could serve in a portion of the force that could be maintained much like the strategic reserve of the past. If the Army Reserve can find a way to accommodate the needs of this diverse force, it would provide for more flexibility and more options for serving in the Army Reserve.

Second, there should be an ongoing strategic communications effort to communicate information regarding the transformation to an OR with an accompanying mechanism to solicit feedback from Army Reserve Soldiers. The survey conducted for this paper described the concept and directed respondents to the Army Reserve Home Page to review a fact sheet on the OR before completing the survey. Respondents clearly had an understanding of the concept, were living the concept, and had some good recommendations to offer. Keeping the force informed and making them part of the transformation process can only benefit the new operational Army Reserve. The survey suggested that portions of the force, particularly Soldiers in the IRR, are unclear about the transformation to an OR and less supportive of the concept.

While research for this paper and the survey showed no major employment issues, anecdotally and in the press there is evidence that certain business sectors and small businesses (or the self-employed) are impacted to a greater extent than others by frequent mobilizations. Implementing an agile personnel management system as outlined above will mitigate some of the employment issues, but carrying it a step further by implementing an active Army Reserve Employer Relations program will benefit the force. This program, should keep employers of Army Reserve Soldiers up-to-date on key OR issues, thank them for their ongoing support, and remind them of the quality, values based training that Army Reserve Soldiers bring to their civilian jobs. This should not only be a public affairs effort, but should include regional conferences to share information and establish ongoing relationships beneficial to both the Army Reserve and the organizations that employ Army Reserve Soldiers.

Of note from the survey was a fairly strong negative view of the transformation to an OR from IRR respondents. Nearly 40 percent said the transition had a negative impact on their morale and satisfaction with service, and 36 percent felt that the use of the Army Reserve as an operational force was a negative policy move and a threat to long term organizational health. A sample quote is below:

IRR should not be an operational reserve. I did 3 tours on active duty and only got off a year ago. Yet somehow that time doesn't count once I'm in the IRR. A four year active duty contract should mean four years. I deliberately chose not to join the Reserves when I got off of active duty. I didn't sign up for this.

It is important that both the Active Army and Army Reserve manage expectations for Soldiers so they understand their commitment i.e. eight years of service, and the reality that Soldiers in the IRR are being called to serve on a fairly regular basis. Again, a flexible and agile personnel management system that identifies those who can train and mobilize on a more

regular basis may mitigate some of these issues and make Army Reserve service more appealing.

Finally, honest and upfront recruiting advertising that accurately portrays the commitment required for new recruits in an operational Army Reserve and a clear differentiation from the Active Component will improve Non Prior Service recruiting and first term retention for Army Reserve Soldiers. The Army Reserve has already taken steps to communicate information and expectations about training and the need to be prepared for mobilization (train near home, ready when needed). What needs to be communicated more clearly is the fact that Army Reserve Soldiers maintain their civilian lifestyle, civilian career and education when they are not in uniform. Research shows that current prospective recruits don't understand the finer details of what makes the Army Reserve different from the active component and what the commitment to training and mobilization really is. By making expectations clear in advertising and in the recruiting process, our recruits will know what to expect which may help improve first term Soldier retention numbers.

The Army Reserve is not in crisis and is managing its way through its transformation to an operational force. The Army Reserve is already implementing initiatives to provide for more agile management of personnel and mobilizations. This paper and the supporting research provide data and recommendations for the Army Reserve leadership to consider as it continues its transformation.

Endnotes

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